

According to a study done in 2006... everyone's circle of **close** friends... is getting **smaller**. ... What this study found... was that ... over the past twenty years... the number of people... of whom we would say... "matters important to us"... those we could label that way... **dropped**... by nearly a third... The number of people who said they had **no one** to talk to... about important matters... more than doubled... to nearly 25 percent.

A 2012 New York Times article added that this scarcity of close friends has especially impacted mid-lifers. ... During midlife it's harder to meet the three conditions required for making new friends—proximity; repeated connections; and a setting that encourages people to let their guard down and confide in each other.

The article went on to state:

In your 30s and 40s, plenty of new people enter your life, through work, children's play dates and, of course, Facebook. But actual close friends—the kind you make in college, the kind you call in a crisis—those are in shorter supply. As people approach midlife, the days of youthful exploration, when life felt like one big blind date, are fading. Schedules compress, priorities change and people often become pickier in what they want in their friends. No matter how many friends you make, a sense of fatalism can creep in: the period for making B.F.F.'s [best friends forever], the way you did in your teens or early 20s, is pretty much over. It's time to resign yourself to situational friends: K.O.F.'s (kind of friends)—for now.

There is no doubt in my mind that our social media of today... (facebook... email... and other online social gathering places) which I partake in... is part of the problem... as it gives a false sense of community.

Sherry Turkle... a professor at M.I.T.... has spent the last 15 years studying how our "plugged-in lives" have changed who we are. She claims that all of our technological devices have produced a world... in which we're always communicating... but we're seldom having real conversations.

Consider the following observations that Turkle makes:

- We are tempted to think that our little "sips" of online connection add up to a big gulp of real conversation. But they don't. E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, all of these have their places But no matter how valuable, they do not substitute for conversation. Connecting in sips may work for gathering discrete bits of information or for saying, "I am thinking about you" But connecting in sips doesn't work as well when it comes to understanding and knowing one another.
- We expect more from technology and less from one another and seem increasingly drawn to technologies that provide the illusion of companionship without the demands of relationship. Always-on/always-on-you devices provide three powerful fantasies: that we will always be heard; that we can put our attention wherever we want it to be; and that we never have to be alone. Indeed our new devices have turned being alone into a problem that can be solved. When people are alone, even for a few moments, they fidget and reach for a device Our constant, reflexive impulse to connect shapes a new way of being. Think of it as "I share, therefore I am."

As much as I use social online media... I have to admit... that there is a real danger lurking. As Turkel points out... we may be satisfying our need for friendship... and I might add a sense of significance ("Hey listen to what I thought of"... "Look what I got to do..." "Look what I found... or stole from somebody else's Facebook page..." "Look where I am..." "Look what I am eating..." "Don't you wish you were me...?") – we may be substituting all this for a **real** sense of companionship...

God made us to need each other. The plain and simple Biblical truth is this: true health — spiritually, emotionally, and physically — can only be found in community. And in today’s passage in Philipppians... Paul shows how believers have the deepest kind of community with each other... its called “fellowship.”

I think that Eugene Petersen is one of the clearest evangelical thinkers of our day. This is what he says about it...

- Love cannot exist in isolation: away from others, love bloats into pride.
- Grace cannot be received privately: cut off from others, it is perverted into greed.
- Hope cannot develop in solitude: separated from the community, it goes to seed in the form of fantasies.

God made us to need each other. This is especially true for the believer. We are called to love one another... and we can’t do that in isolation. God wants us to experience His grace and to show it to others... but we can’t do that if we insist on being “private people.” All of the hope that results from our faith... turns to nothing more than pipedreams.

Last week we began a new sermon series in the book of Philipppians. We studied the first two verses of chapter one... and saw how Paul’s opening of his letter to the saints at Philippi condensed the message that he would go on to unpack in this letter.

This fellowship of believers... who Paul loved dearly... was having their deep sense of fellowship threatened. ... The church was dividing up... some taking sides with Euodia... and others with Syntyche... as these two women squabbled with each other... Although Paul does not address their

contention directly... until chapter 4... from the very beginning of his letter... the Apostle Paul lays the groundwork... and gently works his way to it. Nearly everything in his letter to them... is related to the church struggle that threatened to break their necessary fellowship to pieces. Paul spells out many principles that if they were to acknowledge and apply... the skirmish would be over... (Any group of believers who would apply these principles that he brings forth... could prevent a lot of church quarrels.)

In our verses today... Paul highlights the beauty of Christian fellowship. ... Author and Christian Radio Talk Show hostess... Federika Matthews-Green... I think is SO right... when she said: *“The main evidence that we are growing in Christ is not exhilarating prayer experiences, but steadily increasing, humble love for other people.”*

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- II. I have you in my heart (Phil. 1:7-8),
- III. I have you in my prayers (Phil. 1:9-11).

This is our outline for this message today... as we investigate what is so important about living in this kind of community with each other. So let's begin now with...

- I. I have you in my mind

Philippians 1:3-6

This is the recognition that no Christian lives his life alone. ... He/she can't. We can't live as Christian hermits. ... We are members of a family... and

we need each other very, very much. ... There is no such thing as a solitary Christian... one who has no relationship with anyone else.

I know occasionally you meet people... who because of difficulties they experience in Christian relationships... want to go live their lives by themselves. ... They never want to come to church or have anything to do with other Christians. ... Quite frankly... whenever I hear that... I am immediately suspicious as to whether they are really Christians. ... The reason is because one of the first signs the scriptures tell us of new life in Christ... is that we love the brethren. ... John says this is an unmistakable sign that we are born again... that we love our fellow believers... and if we choose to live apart from them something's wrong.

1 John 4:7-8 (ESV)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

So... someone... who claims they are a Christian... but chooses to live apart from other believers... where they cannot show love and fellowship... clearly demonstrate that something's wrong in their being rightly related to Christ.

You notice how Paul thanks God continually for all of the believers in Philippi. He needed them! ...even the irritating ones!... and there **were** some. The church was diving into sides... over **whatever** the issue was that Euodia and Syntyche had with each other. ... there was a lot of irritation going on... But Paul loved them all! ... You notice how he specifically says "always in every prayer of mine for you all."

Perhaps you find it as amazing as I do that Paul is thinking of others... and not of himself... at this time. ... Because... where was Paul as he wrote this...? He was sitting in a filthy Roman prison... waiting the results of his trial. In fact... Paul alludes to his situation several times in this letter... telling us that his case has been heard... any moment the verdict is expected...as to whether he is set free or is put to death... But here he is with his mind focused on the believers in Philippi... and every recollection he has brings him joy.

Now... if you were to Read Acts 16... you would discover that some things happened to Paul at Philippi... the memory of which might produce sorrow... if it were you or I. ... Paul was illegally arrested and beaten... was placed in the stocks... and was humiliated before the people. ... But even those memories brought joy to Paul... because it was through this suffering that the jailer found Christ! ... Paul recalled how Lydia and her household... a poor slave girl who had been demon-possessed... and several others had found Christ while he was there... and each recollection was a source of joy.

This is the first of 16 times that Paul used the word “joy” in this letter. In all of Paul’s other letters... he mentions his prayer and thanksgiving for them... but only in this letter does he include joy with it. Furthermore... the way Paul included the word joy... was an awkward positioning for a Greek sentence... as though Paul intended for it to stand out. He forced it upon the Philippians and our attention. ... Joy lies at the heart of genuine Christian fellowship. It serves as the primary evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. ... Look... if you have a certain dread week after week about coming to church... something is wrong – and it may not all be the fault of

the one's you have come to have fellowship with. (Paul expresses joy toward them all... and there were difficult people among the Ya'all that Paul writes here...)

Coming from an itinerant preacher imprisoned for his faith... joy would be the last attitude one would expect. ... Paul had joy despite his imprisonment and the uncertain decision on his case. ... True joy rises above the rolling waves of circumstance.

Paul was in prison... awaiting possible death. ... This means that joy is not a result of pleasant circumstances or prosperity or success. ... Joy for Paul (and the Biblical writers) was **not** an emotion or a mood or a feeling but an *attitude*. ... And thus it **can** be commanded... whereas an emotion cannot.

Later on in Philippians Paul **will** command... "*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord*" (3:1), and a few verses later, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice*" (4:4). ... He even tells them that if the verdict is to be executed... he plans to rejoice... and so should they (2:17, 18).

This only makes sense... once we stop thinking that joy is an **emotion**. He does not urge a *feeling*... but an **attitude**. It is a mindset... it is a demeanor... it is an approach... an outlook!

The source of joy is outside itself. It is "in the Lord" (cf. 2:29; 3:1; 4:4, 10). ... It can be commanded because **they are** "in the Lord"... Who gives it. What Paul **does**... with this early joy note... and its fifteen echoes (throughout this letter – we are going to see it again and again)... is to model the joy that he will command the Philippians to have.

Paul says that he experiences this joy because of the fellowship that he has with the Philippian believers. In verse 5... the word for “partnership” is the same word that is used for fellowship. Genuine fellowship has a strong sense of partnership. Paul and these believers were partners in spreading the Gospel. ... They had sent a generous gift of money to Paul... while he sat in a dark prison... there in Rome... and they also sent a beloved Brother named Epaphroditus... who Paul mentions in chapter three... Epaphroditus sat with Paul and ministered to him... feeding him... because prisons back then did not serve food. This church partnered with Paul in a magnanimous way.

A lot of believers desire to have such magnanimous fellowship. ... But I think that when Christians go from church to church looking for good... vital fellowship... they are looking for an illusion.

What do I mean? They are looking for a permanent emotion of joy... based on continuously pleasant circumstances. ... That is an illusion. They don't understand that Paul says joy is the outlook that they are to put on. They seek an elusive emotion that they think should be automatic and continual.

Would you like to know how Paul found such joy...? Look carefully at verse six...

Philippians 1:6

Perhaps his joy in these people at Philippi... was that he was seeing them by faith. ... Not as they were... but as they would be when God's work was done. ... He was looking at them with the eye of faith. ... He was sure that He who began a good work in them was going to finish it... so he could say

even though you rub me the wrong way once in awhile... I know what you are going to be.

I think this is the key to getting along with other Christians. ... We all know that sometimes... it's difficult. ... But when we see what they will be... we can do it.

I certainly am not an artist. But I enjoy watching an artist do a quick painting... or a fast sketch. ... they go at it with enthusiasm and delight. They start putting on the paper or canvas markings that look to me like one big mess. And as they do it... they have a manner of great delight about them. ... It just looks like dabs of different colors to me... without form or anything." ... The artist... through... is seeing it as it will be when finished. I can only see it as it is now.

Paul was looking at them... like a painter looks at the early stages of his canvas painting. ... He was seeing these Christians as they would be and he says thank God it's going to happen.

What a convicting verse this is! ... Many times... I confess... in times of discouragement with others... I only look at them as they are now... when I could have the perspective that Paul had... and offer them grace.

No one's life is perfect – yet! ... And God is still perfecting... Furthermore... the final responsibility is not in my hands but in God's. I love that! ... You see... no matter how angry or discouraged I may become ... and I think that my attitude or showing of disgust needs to “train them”... I need to place my confidence in Christ... Who will perfect them... and me. Ultimately... it is not up to themselves to change... or myself.

This is what Paul is saying. ... We are all... if we know Christ... in the hands of the One who can change us. ... God knows how to bring us into the circumstances that will make us into the people He wants us to be... It's a great consolation to recognize in Whose hands we are.

We can have joy... even with difficult people... by trusting in Christ's perfecting work!

Deepen your fellowship with other believers. Place them in your thinking... and have an outlook of joy.

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Now we move a bit deeper... for it is possible to have others in our minds... without really having them in our hearts.

Philippians 1:7-8

He is anticipating their reaction to what he has written. He knows that when they read verses three and four they will say... *"Oh Paul, you shouldn't say that. We're not that good. We're not that worthy of your praise"* ... And he writes, *"No, it's right for me to think that. In fact you are so close to me it's as though you are sharing my imprisonment and my ministry everywhere I go. That is how I hold you in my heart."*

But this is not mere **natural** affection. This is not an affection that you and I... or Paul... can whip up in our heart. ... And in verse eight in particular... the secret comes out. ... *"God is my witness,"* he says. ... Of what? ...

“That it is not my natural affection for you all because you have been so kind to me. ... But the affection I have for you... is Jesus Christ's affection through me... .. This is all **His** affection.

OK... now we have come to the nitty gritty... the secret of loving the unlovely. ... Because we **are** all called to do that... you know. ... If a man... woman... boy... or girl is a brother or sister in Christ... we are expected to love them. Not only that... we **can** love them.

Well you say... "You don't know the one I have to contend with.... And you don't know what they have done to me... Oh I know they are a Christian... but the way they carry on and the difficulties they put in my path to loving them... you will never understand..."

And I say... "Well, perhaps I won't... but that doesn't change the fact we are to love them..."

So... how do we do it?

It appears that Paul's answer is: begin to think how does the One who lives in me... look at these people? ... What is His attitude? ... Is it resentment... bitterness... anger because of their actions? ... Or does He see them differently than I? ... Is He looking at them the way He will perfect them...? Then act on that basis.

Begin to act toward them as you know the One Who is in you acts and thinks toward them. ... And what Paul indicates here is that when we do... there will **come** a sense of affection... for these very ones who were so hard to love.

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Philippians 1:9

This is a prayer for maturity... and Paul begins with *love*. ... After all... if our Christian love is what it ought to be... everything else should follow. ...He prays that they might experience *abounding* love and *discerning* love. Christian love is not blind! ... The heart and mind work together so that we have discerning love and loving discernment. ... Paul wants his friends to grow in discernment... in being able to "distinguish the things that are truly important.

Love by itself... left to flow unchecked and unregulated... can sometimes be disastrous. ... Love acts like hate when it refuses to think.

All of us have had experience with... let me call them... "consecrated blunderers"... We have all... at one time or another... displayed a "sanctified stupidity." ... This was when we mean well... our hearts are in the right place... but we simply did not bother to get the facts... and see if the help we offered was intelligent help. We might have actually added to the problem... weather it was giving someone some money and they turned around and used it to further harm themselves. Or our help kept them from taking responsibility for themselves... and developing maturity in their own life.

Paul says that a zealous love... isn't enough. Love must be with with knowledge. ... We must learn the situation. ... Many times throwing money at a problem to someone in need is not the right thing to do. ... See how you can really help. ... Don't just plan to help without any investigation as to whether it will accomplish the best result.

We have people make their appeals to the church for financial assistance quite often. Many times they have an attitude... "Well you are a Christian church... it is your obligation to give me money – because I asked..." Paul reveals to us here... that we need knowledge and discernment. We need to investigate. ... There is a time to help... and people to be helped... but there are times not to help... and people who ought not to be helped.

And then the last thing is: What will love do... with knowledge and discernment? ... What will be the result?

Philippians 1:10-11

There are four things mentioned. ... First... so that you may approve what is excellent. ... That is... you will put the proper priority on things. ... You will approve the things that matter most... and not spend your time on trivia. ... If we have the right perspective... we will approve what is excellent.

Furthermore... we will be sincere and blameless. ... This word "sincere" is most interesting. ... In the Latin it means "*without wax*" and in the Greek... as it is given here by Paul... it means "*sun tested*". ... But both of these come from the same experience.

In the ancient world... oftentimes they made little images or pottery which would develop cracks. ... In order to pass these off as perfect... some of the merchants would fill the cracks with wax... so the crack was not observable. ... There was a way of find out. ... They put the item out in the hot sun for awhile. ... If there was wax... the sun would melt it and the crack would become visible... so it was "sun tested".

Paul is saying that the Christian life ought to be one without hypocrisy... without wax... so constantly exposed to the light that is in Jesus Christ that it is continually Son tested.

This is where the Christian lives... in the light of the glory that streams from the face of the Father in heaven. ... If in our lives before Him we hide nothing we are then sincere... blameless... and as a result we are filled with the fruits of righteousness.

This is not something achieved by the effort of the will. ... It is growth of character... evident when our lives become honest and sincere. ... They come through Jesus Christ... not through positive thinking... or some psychological experience or psychotherapy. ... It's through Jesus Christ.

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Are you seeking a deeper fellowship with other believers...? ... Or will you be content with little sips of companionship on Facebook...?